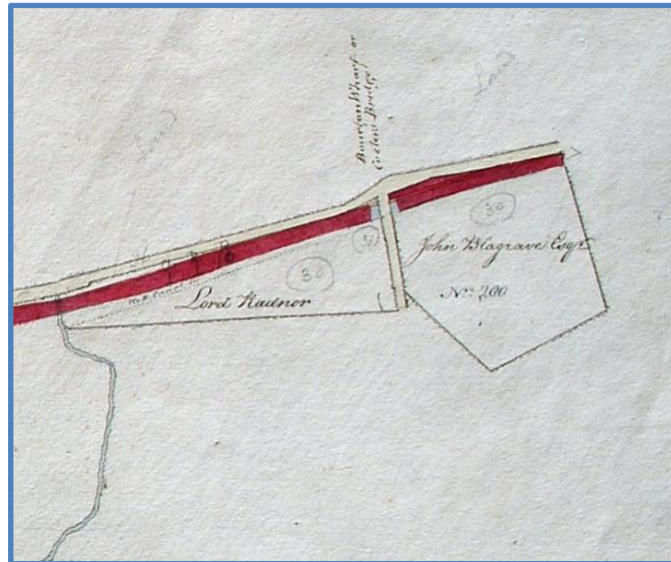


Bourton Wharf

A general history by Neil B. Maw

This history concerns the Wharf that is located on the line of the Wilts & Berks Canal, alongside the A420 near Shrivenham, Oxfordshire. For the greater part of this history, Bourton will be referred to as in Berkshire, as it was so situated until the boundary changes of 1974 due to political fiddling.

There had been plans to put a canal through Wiltshire and Berkshire from the late 1780s. The idea was to link-up the west country with London and the north through the canal system, mainly for the movement of coal. The earliest map produced by the Wilts & Berks Canal Co (W&B) was dated 1793 and, as is shown in the clip taken from a later, updated map, the wharf was located at the junction of the canal and the roads.

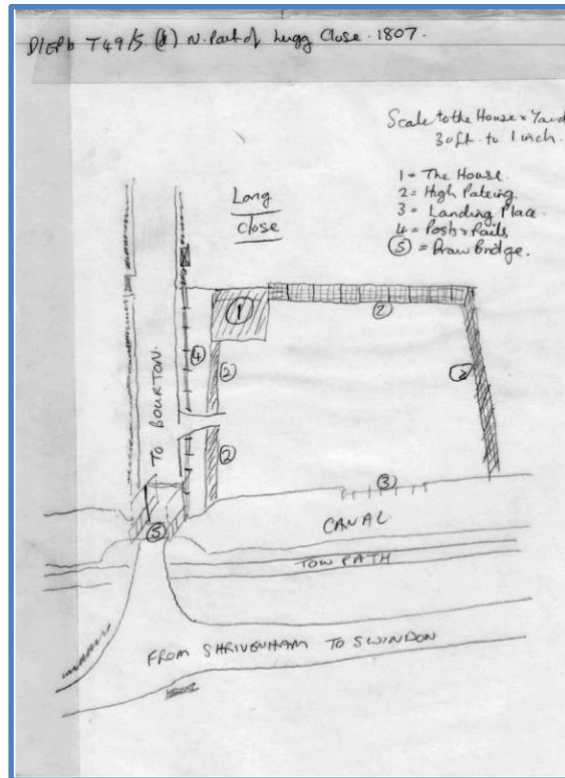


Bourton Wharf does not seem to have been a major feature within the history of the canal. In his book *'The Wilts & Berks Canal,'* L.J. Dalby does not mention the wharf at all other than when it is included in statistical listings. It's likely that it was placed there because the route of the canal lay directly alongside the main road to Faringdon, and the road to Bourton a useful tributary.

Much of the information of this history comes from documents generated by the W&B and what has survived is now held by the Wilts & Swindon History Centre at Chippenham (W&SHC). We are grateful for the notes made by Jan Flanagan of Swindon, gathered over the many years of her researching.

The canal must have reached Bourton by 1803 as there is recorded a payment to David Burrell for his building of a Drawbridge in Bourton Lane. (W&SHC 2424/28). Another entry listed a balance payment '*for land taken for the canal in 1804.*' (W&SHC 2424/29 dated 30th December 1826). We know from documents relating to Longcott Wharf (See SHS Listing N1174), about two miles east, that the canal had reached there by the end of 1805, so the above information fits in well with that. The scale of the work undertaken must have made a large impact on the landscape at the turn of a very rural 18th century countryside. As well as the huge scar of the canal that had been hand-dug by hundreds of navvies, the roads were also repaired. The company accounts listed a payment to Edwards & Camm, '*for taking up old road at Bourton and making new one. From Upper Marston Lock to near Marlborough Road, Shrivenham.*' (W&SHC 2424/28 dated 1806); a distance of approximately three miles.

Information about buildings at the wharf came from legal papers held within the W&B archive. Highworth Solicitors, Kinneir's, dealt with an agreement made by Henry Cook, a Swindon businessman, and the W&B, '*to build at his expense, a Wharfhouse, Warehouse & Storehouse and other buildings of a value £100 at least, to be used by himself on a lease of 14 years.*' (W&SHC 1040/228 dated 27th August 1807). One of Henry Cook's business interests was that of being a Maltster, so Beer sales at Bourton Wharf was a certainty. But it was at this time that Henry Cook entered into an agreement with four others who were mainly Coal Merchants, to form a partnership on a 21year lease, to supply coal from Somerset and beyond, along the Wilts & Berks Canal. They all invested money on an equal share basis, to buy boats for the conveyance of that valuable commodity. It must be assumed that in the early period of the wharf's business, coal was the main cargo being handled there; it was certainly in Henry Cook's interest for it to be so. (Below a sketch from Berks County Archive D/EPb T49/50).



Another entry in the company accounts suggested that there may have been a trade in timber being carried out at the wharf. A receipt from James Beavis for two years rent of a Sawpit made it quite likely (W&SHC 2424/29. Dec 1814). Henry Cook died on 19th August 1815 aged 52 (W&SHC 1040/228 Aug 1815). This left quite a problem for the W&B. The contents of his Will revealed that part of his business dealings also involved banking, which at that time was in the early stages of formation. He was a partner in the Bank of Strange, Strange & Cook of Swindon, and he was described as a Coal Merchant, Maltster, Carpenter and Banker. As his Trustees he named Richard Strange, Grocer and James Strange, Draper, to act also as his Executors. His bank was part of his estate and effectively became responsible for Bourton Wharf.

The W&B seemed to have operated the wharf in the years after the demise of Henry Cook. They would have undoubtedly placed a manager there to run it, but the company documents do not inform who. An Indenture quoted in a later conveyance of 1842 and dated

30th October 1828, provided the information that members of the Coster family had purchased the wharf. Wording such as, *'Dwelling House, Wharf Yard and premises for the use of Joseph Coster,'* suggested that he actually ran the wharf in the period circa 1828 (W&SHC 2424/247, dated 18th March 1842). It's not clear what happened to Joseph. William Coster died on 7th November 1833 intestate. His older brother Thomas died on 2nd April 1836 also without leaving a Will, leaving his eldest son William as heir at law. The W&B did a deal with William to buy the dwelling house and Wharf Yard for £570 in 1842.

The census of 1841 provided the information that Samuel Keyte was resident at the wharf, and it also revealed that he was aged 75, but a younger male was also listed as Charles Keyte aged 25. A decade later at the Census of 1851 a younger Samuel Keyte aged 56 is recorded there and was described as a *'Coal and Slate Merchant and Beer retailer.'*

Samuel Keyte in 1851
 1851 England, Wales & Scotland Census
 Bourton, Faringdon, Berkshire & Oxfordshire, England

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Household members (4 people) | Copy to clipboard

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Elizabeth	Keyte	Daughter	Unmarried	Female	20	1831	Employed at home	Chadlington, Oxfordshire, England
Judith	Keyte	Daughter	Unmarried	Female	22	1829	Housekeeper	Chadlington, Oxfordshire, England
James	Keyte	Son	Unmarried	Male	23	1828	Coal porter	Chadlington, Oxfordshire, England
Samuel	Keyte	Head	Widower	Male	56	1795	Coal and slate merchant and beer retailer	Ebrington, Gloucestershire, England

Dalby listed in his book the tonnages of coal that were being delivered to the various wharfs along the canal (Page 115). In 1840 there was 685 tons delivered at Bourton, a modest amount when compared to others; for instance, two miles east at Longcot, 2436 tons was delivered. The company accounts also provided the information of heavier work when Mr T. Mitchell was paid for delivering gravel for the Crane Foundations (W&SHC 2424/23 dated 2nd October 1841). But this was a period of more change. Just a few hundred yards to the south of Bourton Wharf, the ground of the Great Western Railway was being cleared and the tracks laid down. It was the beginning of the end for the canal. The railway also caused problems for the canal whilst it was under construction as the W&B accounts show. A fine was paid of £2

by the agent of the Great Western Railway Co (GWR) *'for unloading iron rails at Bourton without a binding stage'* (W&SHC 2424/22 dated 20th July 1840). Presumably this was a breach of safety. And then more flagrant breaches *'Received of J.H. Gandell for Trespass by erecting a Timber Bridge over the Canal at Bourton £1. Also, for opening a Gate through the Towing Path fence at Dores Canal House at Bourton'* (W&SHC 2424/22 dated 5th August 1840).

The census of 1861 recorded that John Powell was running Bourton Wharf. He was described as a Coal Merchant, aged 60 and with him was his wife Maria, aged 50 and his daughter Sarah with her son Thomas. The company records showed that Samuel Keyte had gone to Latton, still employed by them as a Toll Collector. Just after the census, tragedy struck at the wharf when young George Curvey, described in the newspaper as, *'a fine boy, 4 years old,'* was drowned in the canal. At the inquest, John Powell had seen George with two of his pals playing on the bridge. He shouted at them to go away and two of them did, but George remained and somehow fell in and was drowned (Oxford Journal 8th June 1861). A few years later, John Powell was in trouble with the law. He was the victim of a lady called Sarah New and her husband Thomas New, was very fond of drinking with his friend, John Powell who held an outdoor beer licence. She decided that desperate measures were needed and hatched a plan to visit the pub, and with her son ordered some beer that was illegally poured inside the house by John Powell's son-in-law. At the subsequent court hearing it was stated that when she had drunk the beer whilst inside the kitchen, she told the hapless server, *"That is the dearest pint of beer you have ever sold in your life."* And she was right as John Powell was fined £5 or six-weeks hard labour (NWH 22 May 1869).

The Census for 1871 showed John Dolman in residence at the wharf with his wife Eliza and their four daughters. But even though the wharf was still operating, very little freight was passing through it. The company list of coal being moved from Semington was zero for Bourton and not much more along the canal further east. The railway had rendered it obsolete, and the end was very close. As the decade progressed the canal trade was in major decline and the W&B Canal Co was sold in 1877 for £13,496.5.0 and was to become part of the company Wilts, Somerset & Berks Canal Traders Association. Bourton Wharf, complete with the house was advertised for sale the same year, along with many others as the advert below clearly showed (NWH 19th February 1877). It also gave the information that the wharf house

was still occupied by John Dolman, but we have no information as to who purchased the property. The Electoral Register showed that John Dolman was still at the wharf in 1879.

other conveniences, suitable for a Gentleman's Residence, from June 24th next.

THREE SMALL CLOSES of LAND, adjoining Towing Path between Swindon and Stratton, about four acres, more or less, with immediate possession.

BOURTON WHARF, with Dwelling-house and Stable (now in the occupation of Mr. JOHN DOLMAN), also Sundry Strips of Land, from March 25th next.

LONGCOT WHARF, with Dwelling-house, Stables, Cottages, Gardens, &c. (now in the occupation of Mr. H. WHITING), from June 24th next.

UFFINGTON WHARF, with Dwelling-house and Stable (now in the occupation of Mr. JOS. GOODISON), from March 25th next.

A COTTAGE and Sundry Pieces of Land, between Grove and Abingdon (now in the occupation of Mr. H. EDWARDS), from March 25th next.

ABINGDON TYTHE BARN WHARF, with Dwelling-house and Premises (now in the occupation of Mr. J. BERSLEY), from March 25th next.

ABINGDON WHARF, with Dwelling-house, powerful Crane, and Stable (now in the occupation of Mr. R. CURTIS), from March 25th next.

From this point onwards the newspapers do not provide any further information, so the history can only continue with a list of occupiers. The Census of 1881 showed that the Powells were back at the wharf with 21 year old Thomas Powell, his wife Ann, aged 18 and a son and daughter. It's not certain what year the Powells moved and information from a newspaper suggests that the house at the wharf was shared or that there was at least one other cottage on the site, because in 1882 a man called Francis Barrett of Bourton Wharf, was charged with contravening the School Attendance Bye-laws by not sending his children to school. The Electoral Register for 1888 listed Thomas Powell at the wharf and the same register for 1895 showed the same. However, the 1891 Census showed Job King as resident with his wife Elizabeth and two sons, William and Frederick, so it's further evidence of more than one residential property at the wharf.

The 1901 Census showed yet another change of tenancy with Robert Basson and the description of, 'House at Wharf, Bourton.' The Electoral Register for 1907 showed that changes were taking place with Robert Basson, Henry Richens and Francis Telling, all having a connection with the wharf. But the following year, Francis Telling was listed at the wharf only. The 1911 Census showed that the occupier was still Francis Telling with his wife Elizabeth, an adult daughter and two young sons. The Wilts & Berks Canal was officially abandoned in 1914, but the house and wharf at Bourton continued to be occupied as it does to the present day. For that year the Electoral Register recorded that Francis Telling was still the occupier, but then the wharf was not listed again until 1930 when Frederick George Newman and his wife Violet Alice were listed there. The Electoral register for 1933 listed two people, William Ayres and Frank Jenkins. But there is confirmed information that Ernest John Grimshaw and his wife Elsie Mary were there in 1932. The information came about when a newspaper article brought up the mystery of the carvings at Bourton Wharf Bridge. There were numerous carvings and one in particular (below) can be seen today in Bourton Church, the work of a Mr A. Jenkins who stayed with the Grimshaws in 1932. (For further information on the carvings, see SHS Listing No N1404).

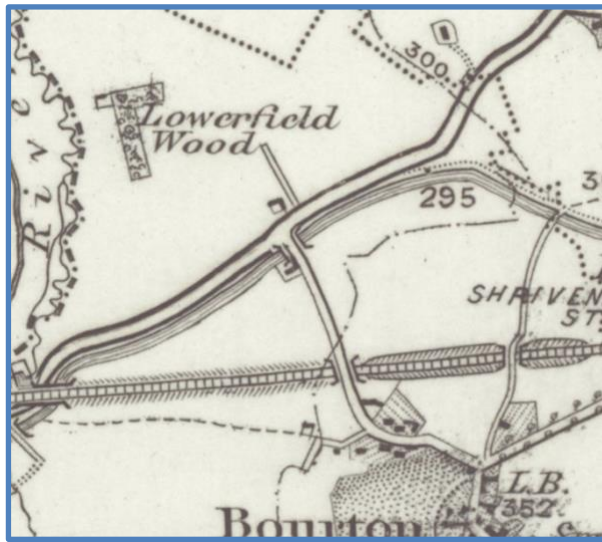


Continuing with the occupiers, the Electoral Register for 1938 listed Herbert William Smith and Dorothy Annie his wife and they were there until 1948. The following year, two couples are listed, Richard & Dorothea Cooper, and Sidney & Nellie Warren.

At this time the people registered as voters at the wharf became increasingly varied and it's likely that the premises consisted of three small cottages. They were named as follows:

- 1951 James Ernest Bull, Gwendoline Audry Bull, Ernest Bull
- 1952 The Bulls, Richard Henry Jeffries, The Warrens
- 1953 The Bulls, The Warrens, Richard Jeffries, Brian Derek Milton
- 1954 The Warrens, Richard Jeffries, Oswald John Willis, Reginald John Willis, Margaret Rose Willis, Joan Nash
- 1955 Joan Nash, The Warrens', The Willis'.
- 1956 Norman Percy Woodward, Olive Woodward, The Warrens'.
- 1957 Richard Ash, The Warrens', The Willis', The Woodward's'.
- 1958 William F. Chaney, Phyliss E. Chaney, The Warrens', The Woodward's'.
- 1959 The Chaney's', The Warrens', The Woodward's'.
- 1960 The Chaney's', The Warrens'.
- 1961 The Chaney's', The Warrens'.
- 1962 Richard H. Ash, The Warrens'.
- 1964 Richard Ash, Harry F. Huggett, Alice M. Huggett, The Warrens', William Timms.
- 1965 Wilson Saunders, Joan Saunders.

Before the Shrivenham By-Pass was constructed in 1983, the road from Bourton ran directly alongside the wharf buildings to meet the road from Shrivenham to Swindon. There was also a swing bridge that was manually raised to allow the barges to pass through. After the canal was abandoned, a fixed bridge was erected. The By-Pass changed the whole layout as can be seen in the aerial photo below.





If you have any comments on this history, or if you could add further information, please contact us on info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk